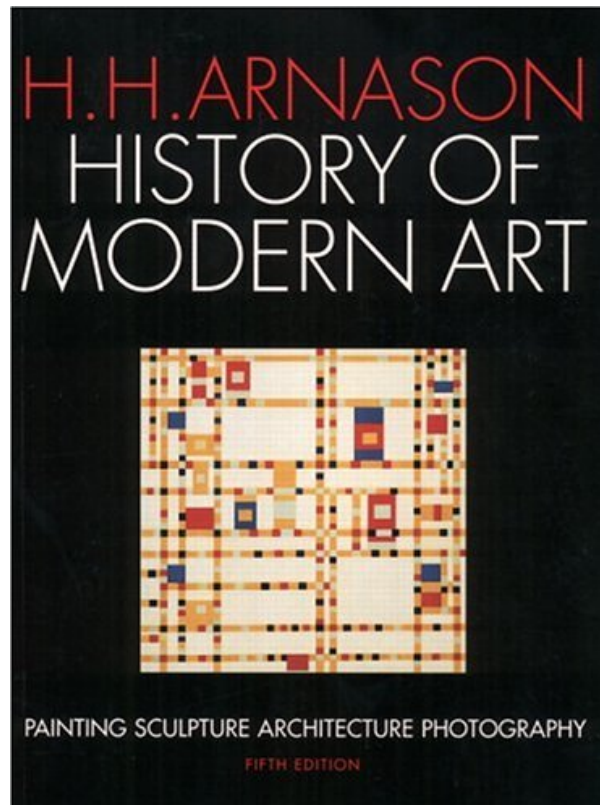


HISTORY OF MODERN ART BY H. H. H ARNASON, PETER KALB



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For undergraduate course in Modern Art, Origins of Modernism, Art Since 1945, Contemporary Art and other courses focusing on art in the 20th century. Long considered the survey of modern art, this engrossing and liberally illustrated text traces the development of trends and influences in painting, sculpture, photography and architecture from the mid-nineteenth century to the present day. Retaining its comprehensive nature and chronological approach, it now comes thoroughly reworked by Michael Bird, an experienced art history editor and writer, with refreshing new analyses, a considerably expanded picture program, and a more absorbing and unified narrative.

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2 of 2 people found the following review helpful.

Well-written, plenty of pix

By Arthur Comings

I have several big survey-type art books, but this is the best. The pix are great, as you'd expect, but what delights me is how well-written and edited it is. Even though it's a big book, it has to cover a lot of topics, and you can read right along, enjoying the developments, without tripping over the author's use of English. That's getting rare these days.

The only thing I object to is their occasional use of black-and-white photos, especially on pages where they're already printing in color. I guess maybe that saves them a little time when they're proofing the book, but it sure doesn't serve the reader well. With a computer nearby, though it's easy to look up anything they reference, though -- and they mention plenty that they don't have space for, even though the book is almost 2" thick.

This is a fascinating subject, and they present it that way. I had to buy it for a modern-art class, and saved a bunch with a used one.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful.

Bursting for more knowledge.....

By Motte 1

Oh dear me! I feel I must come to this books rescue. I am not an academic nor am I doing any arts courses.

In 2005 I went to New York, with a friend more knowledgable about art than I, to see the Cezanne and Pissarro exhibition at MoMA. When I arrived back in the UK I was bursting for more knowledge and information about modern art in particular. My husband, who IS an academic, went The Barber Institute Library, Birmingham and brought home half a dozen books for me to decide upon. This book was one of them. I bought several, the above in hardback, it is a physically large book. I have never looked back, it was a joy to read and I did read every word. Nor did I feel it to be a dry, dusty academic book but one written by someone with enthusiasm and a huge amount of knowledge to impart to me."Two deep-rooted convictions underpin Arnason's 'History': first, that understanding art is a matter of fundamental importance; second, that the way to learn about art is to look for yourself....." a quote from the preface to the fifth edition. What I remember most about reading this excellent book was the NEED for all of us to LOOK at art. Then go and look again, and again.

The fifth edition covers painting, sculpture, architecture and photography. So, not only did I learn to LOOK at paintings again I looked anew at sculpture, architecture and photography again and again.

I thought this book was exciting and it whetted my appetite for much more!

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

Art as the Definitive Indicator of the grand movements of History

By Herbert L Calhoun

Although this review is only of the third edition of this book, it is already a monumental work of artistic scholarship. It covers in a most comprehensive fashion, the history of paintings, sculpture, architecture and for the first time in this edition, has added, photography.

The author's main focus is paintings. His strategy of explanation has been to locate the essence of each new movement, reveal its characteristics to the reader in clear, non-academic prose, and in this he has succeeded beyond the reader's fondest expectation. In each case he attempts to go back to the beginning and then "walks" the reader up through each movement and thus through the ages, covering all of the schools and trends along the way. Although architecture and photography are added on at the end, they nevertheless serve to complete the overall artistic picture.

Beginning with a thorough account of the influential 19th Century academies of art; i.e., the Romantics, the Realists, the Impressionists, and post-impressionists, among others, Arnason provides a detailed analysis of what was accomplished and how the breakthroughs they represented, prepared the way for subsequent innovations such as Fauvism, Cubism, Expressionism, and Futurism. The plates are carefully annotated with background situating them properly in the movement that they apply to. All of the artistic giant's entries are presented in full-color glossy prints.

After the Dada period of WW-I, the new emerging anti-war sentiments, with its counter-cultural tinge, were viewed skeptically as unorthodox and the beginning of a generation-long anti-artistic trend. This shocked the art world into stunned acceptance of a new era of almost completely anti-cultural forms of expression. Surrealism took center stage and the young turks of that era -- led by Pablo Picasso, Salvador Dali, Paul Klee, Henri Matisse, etc., reigned until the renaissance of post-WW-II. Since then we have seen the flowering of the modern and post-modern era. Fortunately for the author (and art critics) the artistic parts all fit together and provide one of the surest indexes of the grand movement of cultural history. Five stars

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The Art of Looking

Arnason was Professor and Chairman of the University of Minnesota's art department from 1947 to 1961, and he had a long association with New York's Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum as its Vice President for Art Administration. He embarked on *History of Modern Art* relatively late in life. The project was conceived and intended as a long-term landmark—the first book of its kind—and it drew on the experience of his distinguished career as an art historian. Two deep-rooted convictions underpin Arnason's *History*: first, that understanding art is a matter of fundamental importance; second, that the way to learn about art is to look for yourself. His Preface unequivocally emphasized his belief in the importance of the individual's face-to-face experience of art—a belief that, as he saw it, gave the book its rationale and its structure:

The thesis of this book, insofar as it has a thesis, is that in the study of art the only primary evidence is the work of art itself. Everything that has been said about it, even by the artist himself, may be important, but it remains secondary evidence. Everything that we can learn about the environment that produced it historically, socially, culturally is important, but again is only secondary or tertiary evidence. It is for this reason that an effort has been made to reproduce most of the works discussed. For the same reason a large part of the text is concerned with a close analysis of these works of art and with detailed descriptions of them as well. This has been done in the conviction that simple description has an effect in forcing the attention of the spectator on the painting, sculpture, or building itself. If, after studying the object, he disagrees with the commentator, all the better. In the process he has learned something about visual perception.

Encouraging his readers to look at art was Arnason's first objective. But he had a further, more challenging aim in view, which was to get people thinking about what it means to go beyond the realm of words—facts, opinions, descriptions, books (no matter how inspiring or enlightening these may be)—and experience art as a purely visual phenomenon. "The principal emphasis of this book," he wrote,

revolves around the problem of seeing modern art. It is recognized that this involves two not necessarily compatible elements: the visual and the verbal. Any work of art history and/or criticism is inevitably an attempt to translate a visual into a verbal experience. Since the mind is involved in both experiences, there are some points of contact between them. Nevertheless, the two experiences are essentially different and it must always be recognized that the words of the interpreter are at best only an approximation of the visual work of art.

Why does Arnason consider looking at modern art such an important art to master? The valuation that society places on art, and the reasons for that valuation, change with time, and here again, since *History of Modern Art* first appeared, shifts have occurred in our perception of why art matters.

Experience and Interpretation

The distant roots of Arnason's belief that looking at art is in itself a profoundly worthwhile activity can be traced to the liberal, secular educational ideals of the nineteenth century. These ideals presumed that exposure to the "highest" kind of cultural experiences could make people, whatever their social or ethnic background, better citizens and happier individuals.

More recent generations of scholars and writers have fiercely questioned the foundations of this outlook, but its monuments remain at the center of Western cultural life. The conviction that simply looking at paintings and sculptures, or entering a grandly beautiful building, were necessarily uplifting and "ennobling" experiences was an important factor in the nineteenth-century enthusiasm in Europe and North America for establishing public art collections and opening great private collections to the public. As a scholar working in the orbit of major American collections, Arnason was a direct heir to the tradition of promoting contact with art for the general good. These collections, and later ones founded on their model, still provide the public with their most important point of access to art.

His belief in the power of art to work its own magic in our lives marks Arnason as a man very much of his time and background. Today art has lost none of its cultural glamour, but the role of interpretation is now regarded as not merely helpful for the viewer's own experience but in certain ways essential for it. The idea of art history as a unitary field of knowledge has been replaced by the recognition of diverse art histories, each shaped by a particular interpretative approach. Likewise, the old notion of the canon—a roll-call of indisputable masterpieces that set the standard for all artistic achievement—has given way to a far more inclusive view of what constitute legitimate objects of art historical attention.

These changes have affected the ways in which art is made, viewed, presented, and taught. Textbooks locate art within contemporaneous social, historical, political, and philosophical themes. Museums, too, which at one time were regarded as palaces or temples for the display of self-evidently significant cultural treasures, now see the interpretation of these treasures as an equally important activity, recognizing that any work of art may well mean quite different things to different viewers. To take one obvious example, it is now comfortably accepted, as it would not have been in art history pre-Feminism, that Western art's long preoccupation with the naked female body, in particular the centrality the nude has enjoyed in histories of Western art, does not carry the same messages for women as for men. It is not that we look any more carefully or subtly at art than earlier generations did, only that the range of information regarded as relevant to an understanding (or understandings) of art has been vastly extended.

This new edition, as one would expect, acknowledges interpretative standpoints more openly and, inevitably, more self-consciously than did Arnason's original text. This will be especially evident to the reader in the substantially revised and expanded chapters dealing with art after around 1970, a period during which critical theory and the awareness of multiple interpretations came to inform much art practice.

How Arnason would have interpreted the art of the final quarter of the twentieth century can only be guessed, but he would no doubt have applauded the emphasis on the need for art education to work on a broad front. "It is recognized," he wrote, "that a work of art or architecture cannot exist in a vacuum. It is the product of a total environment—a social and cultural system—with parallels in literature, music, and the other arts, and relations to the philosophy and science of the period." But when he wrote *History of Modern Art*, you quickly gather, following up these parallels was not his primary concern. The two world wars, the

Russian Revolution, the rise of Nazism and the Depression era of the thirt...

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